STRESS

Stress is a feeling you get when faced with a challenge. Everyone is under some form of stress. In small doses, stress can be good for you because it makes you more alert and gives you a burst of energy, but too much stress in too short a time can be harmful.

Stress happens when people feel like they don't have the tools to manage all of the demands in their lives. Stress can be short-term or long-term. Missing the bus or arguing with a spouse or partner can cause short-term stress. Money problems or trouble at work can cause long-term stress. Even happy events, like having a baby or getting married, can cause stress.

Stress is wear and tear on our bodies involving any disruptive influence on a person, either physical or psychological. A physical influence may be an injury, virus, extreme temperature change or exhaustion. A psychological influence is a threat to security, self-esteem, and way of life or safety.

Stress is a factor in a number of medical disorders including hypertension, migraine headache, ulcers, colitis, lower back tension, muscle spasms, rheumatism and arthritis.

Causes of stress:

Stress can be caused by numerous uncontrollable events that occur in our everyday lives including:

- » Personal Loss: Death of a loved one, separation or divorce
- » Job Changes: Trouble at work, getting fired or taking a new job
- » Money Issues: Budget troubles, large debts, loss of income
- » Illness/Injury: Major illness or injury
- » Family Changes: Changes at home caused by pregnancy, family responsibilities, etc.
- » Life-style Changes: Sudden financial gain or a big promotion
- » Retirement: The combination of enforced leisure and reduced income

Symptoms:

- » Not eating or eating too much
- » Feeling like you have no control
- » Needing to have too much control
- » Forgetfulness
- » Headaches, diarrhea, cramps, gas, constipation
- » Lack of energy, lack of focus
- » Tense muscles, sore neck, shoulders and back
- » General aches and pains, upset stomach, back pain
- » Phobias
- » Fatigue/sleeplessness, insomnia
- » Boredom, depression

Can Stress Affect My Health?

The body responds to stress by releasing stress hormones. These hormones make blood pressure, heart rate, and blood sugar levels go up. Long-term stress can help cause a variety of health problems including:

- » Mental health disorders, like depression and anxiety
- » Obesity
- » Heart disease
- » High blood pressure
- » Abnormal heart beats
- » Menstrual problems
- » Acne and other skin problems

How Can I Handle Stress?

Everyone has to deal with stress. There are steps you can take to help you handle stress in a positive way and keep it from making you sick. Try these tips to keep stress in check:

Develop a new attitude:

- » Become a problem solver
- » Be flexible
- » Get organized
- » Set limits

Relax:

- » Take deep breaths
- » Stretch
- » Massage tense muscles
- » Take time to do something enjoyable

Take care of your body:

- » Get enough sleep
- » Eat right
- » Get moving
- » Don't deal with stress in unhealthy ways

Connect with others:

- » Share your stress
- » If needed, get help from a professional
- » Help others